MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

URBAN RING PHASE 2 RDEIR/DEIS

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE – MINUTES OF MEETING

LOCATION OF MEETING: State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: CAC Meeting # 29 – March 18, 2010, 4:00-6:00 PM

CAC MEMBERS:
*Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance
*Larry Brophy, Northeastern University
Kelley Brown, MIT
Peter Cusato, Boston University
John DePriest, City of Chelsea Dept. of Planning & Development
*Paul Ellis, City of Medford
Marzie Galazka, City of Everett
*Elizabeth Gerlach, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
*Vineet Gupta, Boston Transportation Department
Sarah Hamilton, MASCO
*Aaron Henry, Fenway Community Development Corporation
*Deborah Kuhn, Harvard University
*Maureen Lacey, TranSComm - BU Medical Center
Jeff Levine, Brookline Planning & Community Development
*Sergiu Luchian, City of Somerville
*Arthur Mombourquette, Brigham & Women's Hospital
Thomas Nally, A Better City
Charlotte Nelson, Roxbury Strategic Plan Oversight Committee
*Stephen Oakley, Livable Streets Alliance
Aditi Pain, University of Massachusetts Boston
*John Palmieri, Boston Redevelopment Authority
*Susanne Rasmussen, Cambridge Community Development
*William Richardson, Fenway Civic Association
*Carrie Russell, Conservation Law Foundation
Karen Wepsic, On the Move/MBTA Rider Oversight Committee
*Daniel Wilson, Move Massachusetts
Wig Zamore, Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership (STEP)

CAC ALTERNATES:
*Harris Band, Harvard University
Bill Gasper, TransComm/BU Medical Center
*Peter Koff, Move Mass
*Romin Koebel, Fenway Community Development Corporation
*Eloise Lawrence, Conservation Law Foundation
*Jennifer Nadelson, Brigham and Women’s Hospital
Tad Read, Boston Redevelopment Authority
*Ellin Reisner, Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership (STEP)
*Diana Richardson, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
*Cara Seiderman, City of Cambridge
James Shaer, Boston University

*Steve Winslow, City of Somerville
*Tom Yardley, MASCO

CAC EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS:
*Joe Cosgrove, MBTA
*Lourenco Dantas, Massport
*Scott Darling, MBTA
*Julia O'Brien, Department of Conservation & Recreation

* Indicates that the person was not present

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION:
Scott Hamwey, Office of Transportation Planning
Paul Nelson, Office of Transportation Planning

AGENCY/PUBLIC:
Joe Beggan, Harvard University
Robert Curry, Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge
Joanne Harris, AECOM for MASCO
Jeff Rosenblum, City of Cambridge
Fred Salvucci, representing Harvard University
Eric Sheier, MBTA
Steve Silveira, MC Strategies
Kathleen Ziegenfuss, City of Somerville

HANDOUTS:
- Meeting Agenda
- MassDOT letter to the EOEA, dated January 22, 2010
- CTPS draft scope for study of extension of silver line service to Chelsea
- CAC Urban Ring Work Plan for MassDOT

PURPOSE/SUBJECT: CAC Meeting #29

BACKGROUND:
The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is coordinating the Urban Ring environmental review, in accordance with state and federal regulations, as well as the Certificates issued by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEA). The focus of this meeting was to discuss the recent letter from MassDOT to EOEA which announced that MassDOT cannot proceed with the full project and outlines a new focus of work improving the bus corridors along the Urban Ring.

Welcome and Introductions
Tom Nally opened the meeting at 4:10 PM. He introduced Scott Hamway, from the MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning, who would be taking over for Ned Codd as Project Manager for the Urban Ring project. Mr. Hamwey thanked Ned for his work on the project and stated his interest and enthusiasm for working with the CAC.

Review of the January 22 letter from MassDOT to MEPA
Mr. Hamwey reviewed the January 22, 2010 letter from MassDOT to MEPA. The letter states that due to financial constraints and competing priorities MassDOT cannot proceed with implementation of the locally preferred alternative for the Urban Ring Project and therefore has

requested that the MEPA office suspend all review of the Project and withdraw it from the Special Review Procedure. The letter also commits MassDOT to implement Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) improvements or bus enhancements along the corridor in the near term that will be built in a way consistent with the ultimate implementation of the Urban Ring. Mr. Hamwey stated that the letter also outlines a seven step plan for MassDOT and the CAC to advance the goals and specific elements of the project.

Overview of the MBTA Key Routes program

Mr. Hamwey introduced Eric Sheier, the Key Routes Project Manager for the MBTA, to review the MBTA's Key Routes program. Mr. Sheier stated that the Key Routes program is an effort by the MBTA to improve 15 major bus routes in the MBTA system that were selected based on their high ridership and frequent service in dense neighborhoods. There are many different improvements that can improvement service along the bus routes such as stop consolidation, traffic signal priority, and queue jump systems. All of these improvements help reduce travel time, decrease bunching of buses and improve reliability of service. Originally envisioned as a "do more with less" operation, the program has grown legs through the infusion of $7.5 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The MBTA is using those funds to improve Route 39 and Route 23 in the Jamaica Plain and Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston respectively. The MBTA is working to secure additional funds from the Federal Transit Administration to improve service along the remaining thirteen bus routes. The MBTA is also working to improve bus route supervision to accompany the physical improvements.

Marzie Galazka, City of Everett, stated that the City of Everett is currently served by only one bus route and service on that route was recently cut. She asked if there were any planned efforts by the MBTA to expand bus service in the City. Mr. Sheier answered that the MBTA would continue to reach out to the Cities and Towns it serves for such feedback.

Tad Read, Boston Redevelopment Authority, asked whether the entire ARRA funding would be used for improving Routes 23 and 39. Mr. Sheier responded that some of the $7.5 million in ARRA funds would be used for improvements to the Silver Line.

Mr. Read then asked if any one BRT improvement had a large "bang for the buck?" Mr. Sheier responded that the improvements often have to work in concert to achieve the desired route improvements and that no one improvement greatly outperforms the others.

Mr. Read inquired what the expected travel time reduction along Route 39 would be once the planned improvements are in place. Mr. Sheier responded that the project was only at the 30% design phase but that they expected a 15% reduction in overall travel time.

Jeff Levine, Brookline Planning & Community Development, stated that the town has been working with the MBTA on improvements to Route 66 and is excited for the potential service improvements.

Kathleen Ziegenfuss, City of Somerville, asked for clarification of the timeframe for improvements to the 15 routes and if there are any prospects for expansion of the program. Mr. Sheier responded that the improvements to the 15 routes should be complete within three years and that the program would likely expand afterwards. Mr. Hamwey stated that MassDOT would make routes within the Urban Ring corridor a priority for future investment and expand it to communities like Somerville and Everett where the bus routes may not have the highest ridership but contain key bus corridors with overlapping bus routes.

Charlotte Nelson, Roxbury Strategic Plan Oversight Committee, asked when MBTA expected the new 60-foot buses would be put in service along Route 28. Mr Sheier responded that the MBTA is currently training the drivers to drive the new buses which should be complete by the early summer 2010.

Fred Salvucci, representing Harvard University, asked if the frequency of the Route 28 buses would remain the same once the new buses are put in service. Mr. Sheier responded that they would keep the same schedule. Mr. Hamwey added that improving and expanding service along the Route 28 corridor will be examined in an upcoming MassDOT study.

Overview of CTPS Silver Line Extension scope

Mr. Hamwey reviewed the scope of work for a CTPS study to examine extension of the Silver Line from the Airport into Chelsea. Under the proposed scenario, construction of the East Boston Haul Road, the Silver Line would no longer serve each terminal at Logan Airport but connect with the shuttle bus service at the improved Airport station and continue into Chelsea. This service could be run with the existing fleet. Mr. Hamwey stated that this project would improve transit service within this section of the Urban Ring corridor and encouraged the CAC members to support this study at the Boston MPO meeting on April 1st.

Wig Zamore, Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership (STEP), requested that MassDOT supply more detailed graphics related to any business on the agenda in advance whenever possible. Mr. Hamwey agreed that they figure included in the materials was not a good representation of the proposed new transit service and agreed to supply information in advance whenever possible.

Proposed CAC work plan and early action items

Mr. Nally reviewed the "CAC Urban Ring Work Plan for MassDOT." As the title implies, the work plan identifies a set of action items for MassDOT to pursue. It identifies a series of early action projects that should be the initial focus of the work done by CAC and MassDOT. It also oulines additional planning, design and finance tasks. A major recurring them is for the preservation of the Urban Ring right-of-way. The CAC would need all the materials from the EIR process for this task including information on the Allston connection and the Everett routing to the Orange Line.

Mr. Hamwey stated that all study materials are available on the project website (http://www.theurbanring.com/) and he suggested that the scope be scaled down due to the extensive list of tasks and the limited MassDOT staff time available. The process could be iterative where the list of tasks could be re-evaluated every six months. Mr. Nally responded that he would be looking for input from the CAC on what tasks should be on the "A-list" and what tasks could be moved to the "B-list."

Mr. Zamore commented that some short-term improvements would be helpful but that the work by the CAC is more of a long-term visioning effort. He stated that world-class talent is available to assist with this project and has not been tapped. He urged the CAC to incorporate this expertise to make the project and process better.

James Shaer, Boston University, responded that his impression was that the whole project is on hold. He asked what decisions could be objectively made while the project was on hold. Could more planning/design funding be located?

Mr. Hamwey responded that the project is a priority for MassDOT but due to the constrained economic conditions, no funding is available. He asked if the CAC members in attendance had any ideas for pursuing other funds.

Mr. Zamore suggested it might be better to wait for better economic conditions before the CAC pursue other funding sources.

Sarah Hamilton, MASCO, agreed stressing that many aspects of the locally preferred alternative are on hold until the economic environment improves.

Mr. Hamwey suggested some short-term improvements, such as the East Boston Haul Road, can significantly improve transit access and mobility. It could be productive for the CAC to focus on maximizing the benefits of these projects.

Mr. Shaer suggested that the CAC should also focus on the project to put a deck over Commonwealth Avenue in Boston.

Mr. Nally agreed and suggested the Yawkey Station improvements also be included. Mr. Read clarified that the developer will be designing and constructing a station. Ms. Hamilton added that they project is at 60% design and work will be started later this year.

Jeff Rosenblum, City of Cambridge, suggested that the group refocus. The scope of work should be realistic given the resources available. He enumerated the resources available for these early action items: 1. One-third of Scott Hamwey's time at MassDOT; 2. Massport has committed to construct the East Boston Haul Road; and 3. the City of Boston has committed resources to reconstruct Melea Cass Boulevard, although MassDOT does not have full funding for the project. There are no other resources available (ie funds from the Accelerated Bridge Program and ARRA). If the CAC wants funding for anything else, the burden is on them to convince the Secretary that the projects have merit. He suggested that Mr. Hamwey put together a list of planned and programmed early actions and then work with the CAC to identify gaps.

Mr. Salvucci stated that they current list of items is too focused on construction. The focus should be shifted to improving service and adding buses to each route would be one easy way to do this. He suggested that the 28-foot buses formally used on Route 28 could be diverted to other routes once the 60-foot buses are put into service.

Mr. Salvucci also disagreed with MassDOT's stance that funds from the Accelerated Bridge Program could not be made available for improved bus service as mitigation for the construction impacts. Mr. Hamwey stated that MassDOT is committed to the Urban Ring and that he will bring up the CAC's concerns with the Secretary and Administrator of the Highway Division.

Mr. Read agreed with Mr. Salvucci and suggested that the CAC identify any overlap between the 15 key bus routes and the Charles River Basin bridge projects to help gather additional funding.

Mr. Leving suggested that the CAC help identify non-state funding sources to implement some of the short-term projects. He requested that each member of the CAC identify an outside funding source and bring their recommendations to the next meeting.

Mr. Rosenblum reminded the CAC that operating money would also be needed to support service improvements and that they capital investment would not be as productive without it.

Mr. Nally asked the CAC to finalize a list of tasks for Mr. Hamwey to dedicate his time to in support of the group. The final list assembled includes:

- Create a map showing the MBTA's Key Bus Routes and how they overlap with the Urban Ring Study area and the Charles River Basin bridge projects,
- Keep a running list of the funding and staff resources available to support Urban Ring projects, and
- Update the CAC on the progress of the scoped projects at regularly scheduled meetings.

Mr. Rosenblum requested that Mr. Hamwey complete the tasks and disseminate the information to the CAC within two weeks.

Mr. Hamwey agreed and also suggested that the CAC meet with the project proponents (BRA, CTPS, etc.) to learn more about each project and tap into their knowledge.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:02 PM.